

News Release

National Wildlife Refuge System



Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

**McGregor District
401 Business Highway 18 N
McGregor, IA 52157**

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Bald Eagles Call the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge Home

Data recently compiled by the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge confirms a steady increase in bald eagle use of the McGregor District of the Refuge. Nearly 100 active bald eagle nests were counted within the McGregor District which includes Pools 9, 10 and 11 of the Mississippi River. An estimated 79 eaglets were produced from the nests observed. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists, state natural resource managers and volunteers annually gather data on bald eagle populations via ground searches and aerial surveys to track the species' health.

The number of active nests within the McGregor District has steadily increased since 2001. While it was once rare to see a bald eagle, it is now a common occurrence to see eagles on the Refuge. According to McGregor District Manager Tim Yager, "The sight of bald eagles soaring high over the spectacular bluffs that border the Refuge or perched in trees along the main channel or backwaters of the river is certainly inspiring. As the data indicates, recovery of bald eagles, our National symbol, is related to the health of nesting and feeding habitats on the Refuge. While the Refuge and the Mississippi River have some substantial challenges, like sedimentation and invasive species, the continued increase in bald eagle use of the Refuge is a definite bright spot. It's something that every American can be proud of."

The bald eagle was threatened with extinction in the 1960s due to pesticide use and habitat loss. DDT pesticide use on crops caused the thinning of egg shells, which often caused them to break before the incubation period was complete. In 1972, there was only one known eagle nest on the Upper Mississippi River Refuge. The banning of DDT in that same year, along with public awareness and management of public lands to prevent disturbance, launched an amazing

comeback by the eagle. Because of the rebounding populations of eagles, their status was changed from endangered to threatened in 1995. Today, more than 6,000 breeding pairs of bald eagles exist nationwide.

The Upper Mississippi River Refuge is believed to host more eagles and nests than any other refuge in the United States, excluding refuges in Alaska. In winter, bald eagles fish below the river's locks and dams, where the main channel remains open. Because of the impressive numbers of eagles along the river, many communities adjacent to the refuge host year-round eagle watching events commemorating the amazing beauty of our National symbol.

The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge is the most visited refuge in the United States. The refuge extends 261 miles along the Upper Mississippi River from Wabasha, MN. to Rock Island, IL., protecting and preserving habitat for migratory birds, fish, and a variety of other wildlife. This 240,000 acre refuge was established in 1924.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

For additional information contact District Manager, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 460, McGregor, Iowa 52157. Telephone 563-873-3423.